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Report of the Secretary-General on the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)

Reporting period from 9 March to 21 June 2017

I. Introduction

1. The present report provides a comprehensive assessment of the implementation of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) since my report of 8 March 2017 (S/2017/201). During the reporting period, the situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm. On the political front, following considerable delay, agreement on a new electoral law was reached in Lebanon, with parliamentary elections to be held in May 2018. Meanwhile, the conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic continues to place a heavy burden on Lebanon, with 1,011,366 Syrian refugees registered with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) as at 20 June 2017.

II. Implementation of resolution 1701 (2006)

A. Situation in the area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

2. The environment in the UNIFIL area of operations remained stable overall, but heightened rhetoric by both parties led to some anxiety among the local population. The United Nations continued to urge both parties to refrain from potentially inflammatory comments, including through intensified UNIFIL engagement with local leaders and communities in its area of operations. Commemorations of Palestinian Nakba Day, on 29 April 2017, and "Liberation and Resistance Day", on 25 May, were held in the area of operations without incident.

3. On 20 April 2017, Hizbullah conducted a tour for Lebanese and international media in part of Sector West of the UNIFIL area of operations, including along sections of the Blue Line. The Lebanese Armed Forces notified UNIFIL less than an hour before the media tour started, stating that Lebanese Armed Forces personnel would be on the ground. The notification did not include reference to any Hizbullah involvement. UNIFIL saw the media group on three occasions and encountered it twice in different locations, including close to the Blue Line. As a UNIFIL patrol attempted to stop the convoy, a senior representative from the Lebanese Armed

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Forces insisted that the group be permitted to pass, given that the tour had been approved. Another UNIFIL patrol, which was providing security for the ongoing tripartite meeting, stopped the convoy from moving closer to the United Nations position in Ra's al-Naqurah.

4. While UNIFIL personnel did not observe unauthorized armed personnel when they encountered the media group, a UNIFIL investigation, based on reliable media reports and information gathered, found it credible that unauthorized personnel and weapons had been present in the area of operations during the event, most likely as part of a staged display of combatants in an orange grove, at a point on the road between Naqurah and Alma al-Sha'b (approximately 5.5 km from the Blue Line). The presence of such unauthorized personnel and weapons constituted a violation of resolution 1701 (2006).

5. The incident prompted an immediate reaction from the Government of Lebanon. The Prime Minister of Lebanon, Saad Hariri, accompanied by the Minister of Defence, Yacoub Sarraf, the Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces, General Joseph Aoun, and senior Lebanese Armed Forces officers, visited the Blue Line the next day, demonstrating the Government's commitment to resolution 1701 (2006). At UNIFIL headquarters, the Prime Minister expressed appreciation to UNIFIL and to the troop-contributing countries. He stressed the importance of moving towards a permanent ceasefire. My Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the UNIFIL Force Commander welcomed the visit.

6. Separately, UNIFIL observed civilians carrying unauthorized weapons, the majority of which were hunting weapons, mostly in Sector East. The overall number of armed hunters decreased during the reporting period. UNIFIL once observed individuals carrying assault rifles and handguns. On one occasion, in the vicinity of Naqurah, civilians fired shots in the air out of their car while passing in front of a UNIFIL vehicle. UNIFIL observed, on several occasions, the presence or firing of small arms, including during weddings and funerals. In all cases, UNIFIL informed the Lebanese Armed Forces of the violations.

7. Apart from the substantiated reports mentioned in paragraph 3 to 5 above, during the reporting period, UNIFIL did not receive specific information nor did it find evidence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure either being present in or being transferred into its area of operations. The Israel Defense Forces continued to allege that Hizbullah maintains military infrastructure and equipment in southern Lebanon. UNIFIL monitors the area of operations and the Blue Line and reports all violations of resolution 1701 (2006) that it observes, including the presence of unauthorized armed personnel or weapons. In accordance with its mandate, UNIFIL does not proactively search private property for weapons in the south unless there is credible evidence of a violation of resolution 1701 (2006), including an imminent threat of hostile activity from that location. Where specific information is received regarding the illegal presence of armed personnel, weapons or infrastructure inside its area of operations, UNIFIL, in cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces, remains determined to act with all means available within its mandate and capabilities. The Lebanese Armed Forces command continued to confirm that it would act immediately to put an end to any illegal activity in contravention of resolution 1701 (2006) and relevant Government decisions.

8. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. UNIFIL observed an increase in the number and duration of such violations. On 22 May 2017, an Israeli unmanned aerial vehicle crashed north of the Blue Line in the Ayta al-Sha'b area (Sector West). UNIFIL protested all air violations to the Israel Defense Forces and

called upon the Government of Israel to stop them immediately. The Government of Lebanon also protested the air violations to UNIFIL.

9. The Israeli occupation of northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line continued, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and Lebanese sovereignty. To date, Israel has not provided a response to the proposal submitted by UNIFIL to both parties in 2011 aimed at facilitating the withdrawal of the Israel Defense Forces from the occupied area. The Lebanese Armed Forces informed UNIFIL, in July 2011, of Lebanon's agreement to the proposal.

10. Ground violations of the Blue Line occurred mostly as a result of Lebanese shepherds with their flocks crossing the Blue Line in the areas of Bastrah, Kfar Shuba and Shab'a Farms (Sector East), as well as Rumaysh (Sector West). On several occasions in April and May 2017, Lebanese workers removing sand with excavators and trucks violated the Blue Line in the vicinity of Kfar Kila (Sector East). On two occasions, civilians who crossed south of the Blue Line were apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces and subsequently returned. On 1 March, a woman of non-Lebanese nationality crossed south of the Blue Line in the vicinity of Shab'a Farms, claiming that she had lost her way. Israel Defense Forces personnel returned her north of the Blue Line shortly afterwards, where she was taken into custody by the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 27 April, a Lebanese man crossed south of the Blue Line near Kfar Kila and was reportedly apprehended by the Israel Defense Forces in Kiryat Shmona. The following day, the Israel Defense Forces transferred him to UNIFIL at Ra's al-Naqurah; UNIFIL, in turn, handed him over to the Lebanese Armed Forces.

11. Tensions rose intermittently in some areas along the Blue Line owing to activities or work in close proximity to the Line. UNIFIL undertook extensive liaison and coordination efforts with the parties to ensure calm and de-escalate tensions. On three occasions, UNIFIL also observed Israel Defense Forces soldiers pointing their weapons across the Blue Line at individuals in civilian clothes taking photographs of an Israel Defense Forces position east of Houla. On another occasion, an Israel Defense Forces soldier threw rocks towards people north of the Blue Line. From 7 to 10 April 2017, workers cleaned the Wazzani riverbed in the area of the Lebanese resorts (Sector East) along the Blue Line. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces maintained a monitoring presence during the cleaning. UNIFIL also liaised closely with the Israel Defense Forces to ensure calm in the area. On 26 April, tensions increased in the eastern part of the UNIFIL area of operations as a result of the Israel Defense Forces resuming excavation work in the Shab'a Farms area south of the Blue Line. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander requested the Israel Defense Forces to suspend the work and to agree on a way forward using the tripartite forum, in view of the sensitive nature of the area and the potential that an incident across the Blue Line could lead to an escalation.

12. The freedom of movement of UNIFIL was respected, with some isolated exceptions. Only a marginal number of incidents of unfriendly behaviour against UNIFIL took place, including stone-throwing and damage to UNIFIL vehicles. On 10 March 2017, UNIFIL observed that three of its basic temporary observation posts in the vicinity of Blida had been pulled down. On each occasion, UNIFIL immediately engaged the Lebanese Armed Forces to help calm the situation and investigate the circumstances to prevent recurrence. On two separate occasions, Israel Defense Forces tanks tracked the UNIFIL Liaison Branch and Observer Group Lebanon personnel and positioned the cannon in the direction of United Nations personnel. UNIFIL addressed the matter through its liaison channels with the Israel Defense Forces.

13. Relations between UNIFIL and the local population remained largely positive. UNIFIL public engagements provided opportunities to clarify its operational practices and requirements and address the concerns of local communities. In line with the recommendations of the UNIFIL strategic review, UNIFIL explored with the Lebanese Armed Forces ways to expand capacity for civil-military cooperation and collaborative efforts on the ground, including through the establishment of a Lebanese Armed Forces regional centre for civil-military cooperation in southern Lebanon.

14. UNIFIL continued to implement quick-impact projects focused on supporting the extension of State authority and meeting the critical needs of the local communities, thereby complementing the wider United Nations humanitarian and development presence in southern Lebanon, in line with the United Nations strategic framework for Lebanon (2017-2020). UNIFIL contingents, using their own resources as part of civil-military cooperation efforts, continued to provide medical, dental and veterinary assistance to communities. UNIFIL also continued regular training courses for municipal police and civil defence volunteers in firefighting tactics and rescue missions to enhance local capacity and support community resilience. In March 2017, the Minister of State for Women visited southern Lebanon to mark the Open Day on Women, Peace and Security. Twenty elected women members of municipal councils received training from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and non-governmental organization (NGO) experts in municipal management.

15. UNIFIL conducted an average of over 13,500 operational activities per month, including vehicle and foot patrols, "market walks", checkpoints and observation tasks. UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces jointly conducted approximately 17 per cent of UNIFIL operational activities, taking into consideration only those activities that could be conducted jointly with the Lebanese Armed Forces.

16. The Lebanese Armed Forces remained deployed with two reduced-strength brigades in the area south of the Litani River. The Lebanese Armed Forces maintained a reinforced presence in the northeastern part of the UNIFIL area of operations, including Shab'a village and the Arqub area.

17. While the Mission's threat and risk assessment remains unchanged and no imminent threat of physical violence against civilians was identified, Mission-wide planning efforts and training in the protection of civilians continued, including exercises with all relevant United Nations partners. Tailored training modules were developed for UNIFIL personnel on the specific requirements emanating from the Mission's protection of civilians mandate and to help to ensure a shared understanding of the UNIFIL protection of civilians strategy and implementation plan.

18. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force carried out maritime interdiction operations on a 24-hour basis and capacity building for the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy. During the reporting period (until 15 June 2017), the Maritime Task Force hailed 2,279 ships, of which 569 were inspected and cleared by the Lebanese authorities. Joint and coordinated exercises with UNIFIL, complemented by training courses covering a range of land and maritime operational issues, contributed to improved common operational standards between UNIFIL and the Lebanese Armed Forces on land. In addition, the training courses resulted in Lebanese Armed Forces Navy units capable of conducting maritime surveillance and maritime interdiction operations that, in turn, enhanced cooperation with UNIFIL and its Maritime Task Force. Lebanese Armed Forces Navy personnel assumed command for maritime interdiction operations for limited periods of time, in close coordination and consultation with Maritime Task Force personnel. The Maritime Task Force

maintained a visible presence in the southern part of the area of maritime operations to prevent tensions between Israel and Lebanon. The Maritime Task Force does not have a mandate to monitor the line of buoys installed unilaterally by Israel, which is neither recognized by the Government of Lebanon nor by the United Nations. The Israel Defense Forces continued to carry out maintenance activities at the buoys, at times with divers. On several occasions, Israel Defense Forces patrol boats south of the line of buoys fired warning shots or flares and dropped explosive charges to turn away Lebanese fishing boats.

B. Security and liaison arrangements

19. The UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander intensified his regular bilateral engagements with Lebanese and Israeli authorities to maintain the relatively stable situation in areas north and south of the Blue Line. Those efforts were complemented with three tripartite meetings that were chaired and facilitated by UNIFIL. The parties strongly expressed their commitment to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006), to respect the Blue Line and to maintain stability along and across the Line.

20. UNIFIL actively continued to use open channels established with both sides, in combination with a proactive deployment of its liaison component, military observers and units on the ground, to help to prevent violations of the Blue Line and build trust and confidence between the parties. As noted above, those measures were particularly important when tensions increased, including as a result of activities in the Wazzani River and Shab'a Farms areas.

21. In meetings of the tripartite forum, the parties engaged in substantive and constructive exchanges on issues pertaining to resolution 1701 (2006). The Israel Defense Forces expressed concern about their stated observation of an increase in Hizbullah activity and recurrent Blue Line violations in the vicinity of Mays al-Jabal and Kfar Kila, while noting a marked reduction in the number of armed hunters. The Lebanese Armed Forces protested the continuous Israeli air violations over all of Lebanon and the continued occupation of northern Ghajar by Israel, and raised concerns over incidents of weapons-pointing and over extensive monitoring of the Lebanese population in the south, including through electronic means, by the Israel Defense Forces.

22. During the reporting period, discussions were ongoing with the parties about points proposed for the marking of the Blue Line. In parallel, work continued on completing the construction and the refurbishing of other Blue Line markers.

23. To date, the establishment of a UNIFIL liaison office in Tel Aviv, Israel, is still pending.

24. The Lebanese Armed Forces and UNIFIL continued to engage through the strategic dialogue process, which is an integral part of the capability development plan for the Lebanese Armed Forces, and continued to promote the role of international assistance in support of the Lebanese Armed Forces deployed in the UNIFIL area of operations. Pursuant to a request of the Prime Minister, consultations are also ongoing with the Government of Lebanon and the International Support Group for Lebanon to sustain and galvanize support from Member States to Lebanese security institutions.

25. Pursuant to Security Council resolution 2305 (2016), the Department of Peacekeeping Operations completed a strategic review of UNIFIL, the recommendations of which were outlined in my letter dated 8 March 2017 to the President of the Security Council (S/2017/202). The review confirmed the need for

the continued good offices of my Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the Head of Mission and Force Commander of UNIFIL, to preserve the cessation of hostilities and make progress towards a permanent ceasefire. Priorities identified included support to the efforts of the Government of Lebanon in increasing the capacity and presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in southern Lebanon and in its territorial waters. The implementation of those recommendations is under way.

26. UNIFIL has conducted consultations with the Government of Lebanon and the Lebanese Armed Forces on the possibility of establishing what the Lebanese Armed Forces now refers to as a "model Lebanese Armed Forces regiment" to cooperate closely with UNIFIL, in particular along the Blue Line. The Government has reconfirmed its commitment to increasing the presence of the Lebanese Armed Forces in the UNIFIL area of operations, including through such a regiment. On 21 April 2017, the Prime Minister emphasized that the Government was also committed to strengthening the Lebanese Navy with equipment and training in order to control its territorial waters and maritime border.

C. Disarming armed groups

27. The maintenance of arms outside the control of the State by Hizbullah and other groups continues to restrict the ability of Lebanon to exercise full sovereignty and authority over its territory. Illustrating the heightened rhetoric during the reporting period, in a televised speech on 11 May 2017, the Secretary-General of Hizbullah, Hassan Nasrallah, stated that "any future confrontation could be inside the occupied Palestinian territories. There will be no place safe from the rockets of the resistance and the feet of the resistance fighters". On 30 March, the head of Hizbullah's parliamentary bloc, Mohammed Raad, publicly stated that "the Dimona reactor is one of the targets we have prepared for the enemy". On 30 April, a Hizbullah Member of Parliament, Nawaf al Moussawi, publicly stated that "we are capable of inflicting severe damage deep inside Israel, and our capabilities are increasing day by day to inflict this damage deep inside Israel". On 23 May, another Hizbullah Member of Parliament, Nawar al Sahli, publicly referred to Hizbullah's "force of arms, perseverance, science, the use of modern technology and development of weapons".

28. Several statements by Israeli representatives pertaining to the use of force against Lebanese targets were reported. Media sources quoted the Minister of Education and Diaspora Affairs of Israel, Naftali Bennett, as having stated that "Lebanese institutions, its infrastructure, airport, power stations, traffic junctions, Lebanese Army bases should all be legitimate targets if a war breaks out," with the result of "sending Lebanon back to the Middle Ages". The Permanent Representative of Lebanon to the United Nations strongly condemned those warnings in his statement to the Security Council on 20 April 2017. Media sources also reported the warning by Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff, General Gadi Eizenkot, that "in a future war, there will be a clear address: the state of Lebanon and the terror groups operating on its territory and under its authority," adding that any future confrontation would take place on Lebanese territory.

29. Against that backdrop, mutual accusations of violations of resolution 1701 (2006) by the parties continued. The Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations addressed identical letters to me and the President of the Security Council, dated 25 April 2017 (S/2017/356), emphasizing that it was "extremely disturbing that armed Hezbollah militants feel free to move openly in the UNIFIL area of operation, without being challenged by UNIFIL or Lebanese Armed Forces personnel". In a previous letter to the Security Council, dated 13 March (S/2017/216), the Permanent Representative of Israel reiterated accusations that

Hizbullah's purported armed presence in southern Lebanon had been "actively encouraged" by the Government of Lebanon. The Permanent Representative of Lebanon, in identical letters to me and the President of the Security Council, dated 3 April (S/2017/295), transmitted comments from the Armed Forces Command of the Lebanese National Ministry of Defence to refute allegations pertaining to Hizbullah activity contained in the Israeli letter of 13 March (S/2017/216), called the allegations "mendacious and baseless". On 25 May, the Deputy Permanent Representative of Israel stated in the presence of the Security Council that Hizbullah had amassed over 100,000 missiles that were pointed at Israel, in violation of Council resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006). In his letter dated 19 June (S/2017/523), the Permanent Representative of Lebanon denied the presence of armed fighters and weapons in villages in southern Lebanon, adding that Israel encroached on the daily lives, livelihoods and security of Lebanese civilians with "surveillance towers and listening devices all along the southern border". In a letter dated 20 June (S/2017/526), the Permanent Representative of Israel alleged that, over the past few months, Hizbullah had "established observation posts near the Blue Line" under the guise of an agricultural NGO.

30. On the issue of commitment to resolution 1701 (2006), on 16 March 2017, the Government of Lebanon, in a letter addressed to me and the President of the Security Council (S/2017/228), reiterated that it had "implemented all the provisions of Security Council resolution 1701 (2006)", while denouncing what it considered to be threatening Israeli rhetoric. On 21 March, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Lebanon, Gebran Bassil, publicly stated that there was agreement among the Lebanese on the need for "resistance against Israel". On the same day, Prime Minister Hariri told Egyptian media that he continued to oppose weapons outside the control of state institutions. Both Foreign Minister Bassil and Prime Minister Hariri referred to a national defence strategy, yet to be developed, as the framework to address the issue of Hizbullah weapons.

31. Since my last report, the Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces have arrested a considerable number of individuals suspected of affiliation with extremist groups or involvement in terrorist activities throughout Lebanon, with 127 terrorism-related arrests since 1 March 2017. Arrests included those of alleged recruiters, weapons suppliers and financiers for Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant and Jabhat Fath al-Sham (formerly known as Nusrah Front). Weapons caches and illegal arms dealerships were uncovered on several occasions.

32. There was no progress in dismantling the military bases maintained by the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada, which continue to compromise Lebanese sovereignty and impede the ability of the State to monitor and effectively control parts of the border.

33. The security situation in the majority of Palestine refugee camps in Lebanon remained generally stable, although violence in Ein el Helweh between extremist groups and the joint Palestinian security forces remains of serious concern. Between 7 and 12 April 2017, intense clashes over several days resulted in 12 people being killed and 44 injured, the displacement of several hundred families and extensive physical damage to camp infrastructure. Basic service delivery in the camp by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) had to be briefly suspended. Extremist groups remain present in Ein el Helweh amid concern regarding possible linkages between radical groups in the camps and terrorist cells outside the camps. The Lebanese Armed Forces and security forces intervened on several occasions to thwart suspected joint plots. The construction of a security perimeter around the Ein El Helweh camp continued. Intermittent incidents of violence also occurred in Beddawi, Burj al-Barajinah and Shatila.

D. Arms embargo and border control

34. Regular reports of alleged arms transfers to Hizbullah remain of serious concern. In his letter of 25 April 2017 (S/2017/356), the Permanent Representative of Israel alleged that "Hizbullah has been building up its arsenal" by smuggling weapons from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon and was assembling "military infrastructure in the towns and villages of southern Lebanon". The Permanent Representative also cited publications according to which Hizbullah had utilized weapons production factories built by Iran on Lebanese territory. The United Nations takes such allegations seriously, but is not in a position to substantiate those allegations independently.

35. Since my last report, there have been sporadic incidents of cross-border fire from the Syrian Arab Republic into Lebanon. The situation along the border remained tense as the Lebanese Armed Forces stepped up efforts against militant threats, in particular in the outskirts of Arsal, where the presence of extremist groups remains of concern. Robust operations were carried out on 22 and 24 April 2017, in the Arsal, Qa' and R'as Ba'albak areas, among others, resulting in the death and arrest of a number of militants. Heavy clashes were also reported between militants, including ISIL, Jabhat Fath al-Sham and Saraya Ahl al-Sham. Hizbullah also reportedly remained engaged in efforts to prevent the infiltration of militants from the Syrian side of Lebanon's eastern border, as stated by Hizbullah Secretary-General Nasrallah on 11 May. A number of Lebanese nationals were also alleged to have participated in fighting with non-State armed groups in the Syrian Arab Republic.

36. On 10 June 2017, following what appears to have been an agreement between non-State armed groups, a group of refugee families from Arsal was escorted by the Lebanese Armed Forces to the Syrian border to resettle in Assal al-Ward, Syria. Neither the Government of Lebanon nor the United Nations were associated with that relocation. UNHCR, in accordance with its mandate, is compiling data on all refugee families in Lebanon originating from the area in order to assess their intentions.

E. Landmines and cluster bombs

37. The Lebanese Armed Forces, through the Lebanese Mine Action Centre, continues to clear lands contaminated by mines and unexploded ordnance, mostly remnants from the July 2006 war. Around 76 per cent of contaminated Lebanese lands have been cleared thus far, although incidents continue to occur. On 31 May 2017, one youth was reportedly injured by a landmine in the vicinity of Yarun (Sector West). On 3 May, my Special Coordinator and the Ambassador of the European Union to Lebanon visited a demining site to stress the importance of continued progress in order to reduce potential harm to the safety and security of all and as an important factor for economic regeneration, especially in southern Lebanon. The Lebanese Armed Forces is operating with half the capacity needed to implement its action plan owing to a lack of financial resources and limited donor funding for demining activities. Through a Mines Advisory Group project funded by the OCHA Lebanon Humanitarian Fund, the Lebanese Armed Forces has initiated demining activities close to Syrian refugee settlements in the Biqa' governorate.

38. Mine clearance and explosive ordnance disposal continued also in the UNIFIL area of operations, with the clearing 163 m^2 of land. The United Nations Mine Action Service conducted quality assurance visits, training and safety monitoring for UNIFIL troop-contributing country demining teams. Safety training and

awareness briefings with respect to landmines and explosive remnants of war were provided to United Nations personnel. On 4 April 2017, mine awareness events were held on the occasion of International Day of Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action and the twentieth anniversary of the United Nations Mine Action Service that involved over 750 children and over 200 UNIFIL personnel.

F. Delineation of borders

39. No progress was made towards the delineation or demarcation of the border between Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, including in areas where it is uncertain or disputed. During his visit to southern Lebanon on 21 April 2017, Prime Minister Hariri called for the delineation of the international borders, especially in those areas where the border is disputed or uncertain, and reiterated Lebanon's request for United Nations good offices in that regard. There was no progress in addressing the matter of the Shab'a Farms. The Syrian Arab Republic and Israel have yet to respond to the provisional definition of the Shab'a Farms area proposed in my report of 30 October 2007 on the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006) (S/2007/641).

40. On 20 March 2017, in a note verbale, the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations protested the claim by Israel, as reflected in its note verbale of 2 February, that Lebanese offshore blocks 8, 9 and 10 were in "maritime areas that belong to the State of Israel" (see S/2017/201, para. 57). Emphasizing that "Israel is not entitled to interfere in any way whatsoever with the exercise by Lebanon of its sovereign rights and jurisdiction, and is not allowed to conduct any economic activity in Lebanese maritime areas", the note reiterated Lebanon's commitment to the Convention on the Law of the Sea regarding the delimitation of its maritime borders.

G. Political and institutional stability

41. On 16 June 2017, following several delays, the Parliament of Lebanon approved a new electoral law that provides for proportional representation in 15 electoral districts and introduces an additional "preferential vote". By the same token, the Parliament extended its own tenure until May 2018, when elections are projected to be held, pending the decision of the President and the Prime Minister. The International Support Group for Lebanon welcomed the agreement in a joint statement. An extraordinary session of Parliament opened on 21 June and is projected to last until 16 October.

42. The Cabinet has met regularly and passed a number of decrees, including those relating to important appointments to the helms of security institutions. On 8 March 2017, General Joseph Aoun was appointed to the post of Commander of the Lebanese Armed Forces; Major-General Imad Othman was appointed to the post of Director General of the Internal Security Forces; and Major-General Abbas Ibrahim was reappointed to the post of Director General of the General Security Office.

43. Lebanese efforts to strengthen the security forces continued with the approval by the Cabinet on 17 May 2017 of the enlistment of 2,000 new recruits into the Lebanese Armed Forces. On 23 May, the Minister of Interior, Nohad Machnouq, announced a five-year development plan for the Internal Security Forces as part of capacity-building efforts. Other Cabinet decisions included: a draft State budget for 2017, subsequently sent to Parliament for ratification, which remains pending; a new electricity plan; and the renewal of the term of the Governor of the Central Bank until 2023.

44. The Government of Lebanon, with the support of the United Nations, is in the final phase of developing Lebanon's national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism, in line with the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, presented in 2016. The strategy is undergoing a consultative interministerial process aimed at ensuring ownership and a concerted effort by all line ministries in its implementation.

45. The Committee Against Torture, established under article 17 of the 1984 Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, made a number of recommendations following its review, in April 2017, of the first report by Lebanon to the Committee, submitted with a 15-year delay. The Committee highlighted the need for a law criminalizing torture as a serious human rights violation and additional measures to address impunity. The Committee recalled the absolute prohibition on extraditing individuals to countries where they may face torture. The Committee also reiterated the need for a national human rights institution that would also serve as a national preventive mechanism against torture. The Government of Lebanon established such a national human rights institution by law in late 2016, but the nominations for its members have yet to be endorsed.

46. Six years into the Syrian conflict, over 70 per cent of Syrian refugees in Lebanon, of which 53 per cent are children, live below the poverty line. It is estimated that 93 per cent of the Syrian refugee population experiences some degree of food insecurity, a trend that continues to worsen. More than half of refugee households are not able to afford the Survival Minimum Expenditure Basket, which is a measure of the minimum amount of basic items needed by the average refugee household each month. In addition, the dwellings of 42 per cent of households do not meet minimum humanitarian standards. Children remain especially vulnerable, with nearly half of primary-school age refugee children out of school.

47. Almost three-quarters of Syrian refugees resort to negative coping mechanisms, such as early marriage, begging or child labour, as well as reducing essential expenses, including for education and health care. As remaining savings and assets increasingly run out, households are also sinking deeper into debt: 90 per cent of refugee households are borrowing money or receiving credit. While Syrian refugees are now allowed to work legally in the sectors of agriculture, construction and waste management, their livelihood opportunities are limited. The Government of Lebanon also started to implement its previously announced decision to waive residency renewal fees for Syrian refugees registered in Lebanon. The 2016 Vulnerability Assessment of Syrian Refugees pointed to the need of Syrian refugees for increased access to technical and vocational education and training as being key to reducing their socioeconomic vulnerability and their dependency on aid.

48. In follow-up to the London and Brussels conferences on supporting Syria and the region, my Deputy Special Coordinator/Resident Coordinator/Humanitarian Coordinator for Lebanon is leading a United Nations joint effort to facilitate an easing of the restrictions that face refugees in Lebanon, while also ensuring parallel support for Lebanese host communities. That effort is guided by a focused action and advocacy plan developed by relevant United Nations agencies, which calls for pragmatic solutions to support vulnerable Lebanese individuals and refugees (Syrian and Palestine refugees), including through the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan.

49. At the Brussels conference, Prime Minister Hariri warned of increasing indications of tensions between host communities and refugees. He presented the parameters of the Government's vision for stabilization and development, including the contours of a capital investment plan for large infrastructure projects, which would be used as a main vehicle for job creation for the next seven to eight years.

50. Donors continue to generously support Lebanon in mitigating the impact of the Syrian conflict and to assist Syrian and Palestine refugees in the country, but the disbursement of pledges is slowing down. As at 31 May 2017, resources committed amounted to $1.41 billion for the year 2017, which includes $1.1 billion in donor assistance and $309 million carried over by United Nations agencies from the previous year. In addition, donors have already committed $940.7 million in support of Lebanon for 2018 and beyond. United Nations agencies and NGOs reported a total of $236.3 million received under the Lebanon Crisis Response Plan in 2017. That represents 8.6 per cent of the overall appeal for 2017 of $2.8 billion, which constitutes a downward trend compared with the preceding year.

51. Palestine refugees remain one of the most vulnerable populations in Lebanon, an estimated 65 per cent of whom live in poverty. Palestine refugees from the Syrian Arab Republic, estimated by UNRWA to number around 32,000, are particularly vulnerable. Approximately 90 per cent of them live in poverty, of which 9 per cent live in extreme poverty. An estimated 98 per cent of them rely upon UNRWA assistance as their main source of income; those refugees also find it increasingly difficult to maintain legal residency in the country. UNRWA has asked the Lebanese authorities to permit that category of refugees to renew their residency permits free of charge. An official census of Palestine refugees in Lebanon was launched by the Lebanese authorities and is in its initial stage. Due to conclude by the end of the year, the exercise will also generate new vulnerability indicators.

52. In the Nahr el-Bared camp, in northern Lebanon, protests took place from mid-March to early June 2017, with protesters calling upon UNRWA to resume rental subsidies for families displaced by the 2007 clashes that have yet to return to their homes. The protests disrupted UNRWA operations, which have now resumed in full. My Special Coordinator visited the camp on 8 June and emphasized the urgent need for the completion of the entire camp's reconstruction and support for the families most in need. United Nations-wide support and cooperation with the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee continues with a view to improving the situation of Palestine refugees in Lebanon, without prejudice to the resolution of the refugee question in the context of a comprehensive peace settlement.

III. Security and safety of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

53. UNIFIL continuously reviewed its security plans and risk mitigation measures, in particular following security threat warnings, in close coordination with the Lebanese authorities. In view of the armed clashes in the Ein El Helweh Palestine refugee camp in Sidon, situated along the main supply route connecting the UNIFIL area of operations with Beirut, local authorities and UNIFIL made adjustments to their movements.

54. UNIFIL continued to monitor proceedings in the Lebanese military courts against individuals suspected of planning or perpetrating serious attacks against UNIFIL. With regard to the attack against UNIFIL peacekeepers serving with the Spanish contingent in 2007, a hearing at the Permanent Military Court planned for 29 May 2017 was rescheduled to 5 July. In the case of terror intent, opened in January 2014, the Court held a hearing on 20 March 2017; the next hearing is scheduled for 5 July. In the case of an attempted serious attack against UNIFIL in 2008, in which one of the four sentenced perpetrators filed an appeal, the Military Court of Appeal held a hearing on 9 May 2017 and scheduled the next hearing for 2 November. In three cases of serious attacks perpetrated in 2011 against UNIFIL peacekeepers from France and Italy, investigations are ongoing. In the case of a

homicide committed in 1980, when three UNIFIL peacekeepers from Ireland were shot dead, hearings at the Permanent Military Court were held on 17 March and 16 June 2017; the next hearing is scheduled for 26 July.

IV. Deployment of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon

55. As at 15 June, UNIFIL comprised 10,409 military personnel, including 412 women, or 4 per cent of the Force, from 40 troop-contributing countries; 235 international staff, including 76 women; and 579 national civilian staff, including 147 women. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force comprised five corvettes, one fast patrol boat, one offshore patrol vessel, two helicopters, and 845 of the Force's total military personnel, including 11 women. In addition, 50 military observers, including 3 women, of the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization, serve with Observer Group Lebanon, under the operational control of UNIFIL.

V. Conduct and discipline

56. UNIFIL and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon continued to strengthen existing preventive measures against sexual exploitation and abuse, inter alia, by conducting an in-depth assessment of the risk of sexual exploitation and abuse and implementing a comprehensive internal and external communications strategy to ensure that all Mission personnel, as well as members of the local community, are aware of the expected standards of behaviour for United Nations personnel and of how to report any shortcomings, including with respect to sexual exploitation and abuse. In collaboration with the United Nations country team and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon, the UNIFIL standing sexual exploitation and abuse task force reviewed the risk management framework for sexual exploitation and abuse and developed a workplan to implement additional measures to reinforce the framework. During the period under review, UNIFIL received one allegation of sexual exploitation and abuse, which was promptly processed within the applicable timelines. No allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse were received by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for Lebanon.

VI. Observations

57. I am encouraged by the continued progress made by Lebanon towards the genuine reactivation of all of its State institutions. Positive momentum needs to be maintained to reinforce the country's ability to withstand the challenges that lie ahead. The stability of Lebanon remains a regional public good. United Nations efforts will continue to be guided by the need to ensure stability while prioritizing prevention, including through the implementation of the United Nations strategic framework for Lebanon (2017-2020).

58. I welcome the agreement on a new electoral framework as the result of a Lebanese-owned process and as a positive sign that hard-won political progress can be sustained. I am hopeful that that achievement can pave the way for additional political and economic recovery and further the overall stability of Lebanon. Political leadership, responsibility and accountability will remain key to ensuring timely, peaceful and transparent parliamentary elections that honour Lebanon's democratic tradition and respond to the pressing concerns of Lebanon's citizens. The United Nations stands ready to provide electoral assistance to support the

Ministry of Interior and Municipalities and other relevant authorities in promptly addressing any factors that have the potential to cause delays.

59. I note the absence of a quota for women in the new law and count on the political leaders and civil society of Lebanon to continue to promote progress towards the full and effective participation of women in political life, as set out in the Sustainable Development Goals. I encourage the relevant decision makers to ensure that the commitments of Lebanon are fulfilled and that there will be adequate representation of women in the upcoming elections.

60. The continued commitment of Lebanon and Israel to Security Council resolution 1701 (2006) is of crucial importance. I commend in that regard the visit on 21 April 2017 by Prime Minister Hariri, Defence Minister Sarraf and Lebanese Armed Forces Commander Aoun to southern Lebanon and the Blue Line as a sign of the determination of the Government and the Lebanese Armed Forces to ensure that they are the sole authority and protector of the calm and stability of a sovereign Lebanon.

61. I also welcome the Prime Minister Hariri's public statement that a permanent ceasefire must be pursued. Given that it remains the best guarantee for long-term stability, I reiterate the readiness of the United Nations to further assist in that regard. I encourage the parties to actively explore with my Special Coordinator for Lebanon and the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander tangible confidence-building measures that can help sustain calm and gradually pave the way towards a permanent ceasefire. I urge the parties to refrain from provocative actions, exercise restraint and desist from rhetoric, which exacerbates the risk of miscalculation and heightens the risk of renewed conflict.

62. While the situation along the Blue Line has remained relatively calm, the underlying risks posed by the presence of unauthorized weapons and factors of regional instability should not be underestimated. I remain concerned about the continuing presence of unauthorized weapons in the area between the Litani River and the Blue Line, in breach of resolution 1701 (2006). I note with grave concern the highly provocative presence of uniformed and armed combatants during the media tour organized by Hizbullah in the UNIFIL area of operations, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). Hizbullah's continued public acknowledgement of its possession of weapons outside the control of the State clearly contravenes resolution 1701 (2006). Both warrant strong condemnation.

63. As stipulated in resolution 1701 (2006), I call upon the Government of Lebanon to take all actions necessary to ensure the full implementation of the relevant provisions of the Taif Accords and of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1680 (2006), which require the disarmament of all armed groups in Lebanon so that, pursuant to the Lebanese Cabinet decision of 27 July 2006, there will be no weapons or authority in Lebanon other than those of the Lebanese State. The United Nations remains committed and ready to support the Lebanese authorities in that endeavour. It also remains important that earlier decisions of the national dialogue be implemented, specifically those relating to the disarmament of non-Lebanese groups and the dismantling of the military bases of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-General Command and Fatah al-Intifada.

64. I reiterate my condemnation of all violations of Lebanese sovereignty, in disregard of the provisions of resolution 1701 (2006). The Israel Defense Forces continued to occupy northern Ghajar and an adjacent area north of the Blue Line, in violation of resolution 1701 (2006). I also reiterate my call to Israel to cease immediately its overflights of Lebanese airspace and to withdraw its forces from northern Ghajar and the adjacent area north of the Blue Line.

65. UNIFIL liaison and coordination arrangements and the good offices of my Special Coordinator remain critical for information exchange between the two sides and have helped prevent misunderstandings, de-escalate tension and prevent small incidents from evolving into larger-scale violence. The tripartite mechanism remains an effective forum, and I am encouraged by the active engagement of the parties in it. I also reiterate the strategic importance of the Blue Line marking process.

66. I commend the Lebanese Armed Forces for their performance in contributing to calm along the Blue Line and in the conduct of counter-terrorism operations along the border with the Syrian Arab Republic and throughout the country. In shielding Lebanon against threats from extremism and the proliferation of illicit weapons, the Lebanese Armed Forces continues to demonstrate its essential role in the extension of State authority throughout the territory of Lebanon, defending the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity and acting as the protector of the country's security.

67. I reiterate my call to President Michel Aoun to work towards a resumption of the national dialogue with the objective of arriving at a national defence strategy. That would, inter alia, address the issue of arms outside the control of the State and other outstanding provisions of resolutions 1559 (2004) and 1701 (2006).

68. I call upon Member States to continue to support the capacity development of the Lebanese security institutions, including through demining and clearance activities, and to coordinate their assistance through the International Support Group for Lebanon. An updated capability development plan for the Lebanese Armed Forces will be instrumental to identifying needs and set priorities in that regard.

69. As part of the implementation of the strategic review recommendations, I am pleased to note the close engagement between UNIFIL and the Lebanese authorities on the concept of deploying a "model Lebanese Armed Forces regiment" that would work closely with UNIFIL in the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). I encourage Member States to direct their assistance, within the wider framework of the capability development plan for the Lebanese Armed Forces and the UNIFIL-Lebanese Armed Forces strategic dialogue, to supporting such a model regiment to further strengthen the capabilities of the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy with respect to securing the territorial waters of Lebanon.

70. The UNIFIL Maritime Task Force has proved its operational effectiveness in its maritime interdiction operations at the request of the Government of Lebanon. The Mission's close cooperation with the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy in that context forms an important contribution to the implementation of resolution 1701 (2006). Those operations are a significant deterrent against the illegal entry of weapons or related materiel. Daily interaction and exercises with the Lebanese Armed Forces Navy have helped develop the Navy, which remains constrained however by a lack of adequate maritime vessels.

71. I take note of the 20 April 2017 request of the Permanent Representative of Lebanon for an update on efforts to assist with the delineation of the exclusive economic zone between Lebanon and Israel. Contacts continue with all parties concerned as part of the United Nations good offices on the basis of the exchange of letters between my predecessor and the former Prime Minister of Lebanon, Tammam Salam. Prime Minister Hariri has reaffirmed the request by Lebanon for the United Nations to play a role in that regard, and the parties remain closely engaged with my Special Coordinator for Lebanon. I remain hopeful that Lebanon and Israel can commit to a constructive approach to exploiting maritime oil and gas resources, which is a shared economic interest, in a consensual way that minimizes tensions and serves as a confidence-building measure.

72. It is the responsibility of the Government of Lebanon, as the host Government, to ensure the safety and security of UNIFIL personnel and their freedom of movement throughout the area of operations. I call upon the Lebanese authorities to continue their close cooperation with UNIFIL to guarantee adequate protection of peacekeepers, including by bringing to justice the perpetrators of acts committed against them.

73. The participation of Lebanese nationals in the Syrian conflict constitutes a breach of the policy of disassociation, pursuant to the Baabda Declaration agreed by all Lebanese political parties, and poses a risk the stability of Lebanon at a time when it must remain shielded from regional turmoil. I reiterate my condemnation of the participation of any Lebanese national in the Syrian conflict and call upon Hizbullah and all Lebanese parties to cease any involvement in it.

74. I condemn the movement of fighters and weapons across the Lebanese-Syrian border in violation of resolution 1701 (2006) and the shelling and shooting into Lebanese border areas from the Syrian Arab Republic. The continued lack of a delineated, demarcated Lebanese-Syrian border is no justification for violations of Lebanese sovereignty by any party. I call upon all concerned to cease violations of the border and to respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Lebanon.

75. I look forward to progress towards a fully staffed and functioning national human rights institution and its mechanism to prevent torture, pursuant to Lebanon's commitments under the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and recently adopted legislation. The capacity to prevent human rights abuses will be an important element of the stability and prevention agenda for Lebanon.

76. The conflict in the Syrian Arab Republic and the resulting refugee presence continue to pose daunting challenges to Lebanon. I am grateful to the people of Lebanon, whose hospitality in hosting refugees has continued for many years now. The Government's decision to waive the residency renewal fees will have a positive impact on the protection of the Syrian refugees eligible for that waiver, if applied consistently. I hope that the residency renewal fee waiver will be extended to all Syrian refugees in Lebanon.

77. The Brussels conference, held in April 2017, reaffirmed the international community's solidarity with the host countries in the region. Despite pledges received in that forum for the Lebanon Crisis Response Fund and for humanitarian and development assistance through grants and concessional loans, I am concerned that a slowdown in funding will affect the Government's response. I therefore call upon all Member States to provide the means necessary to ensure the provision of urgently needed basic assistance and to mobilize additional longer-term development resources.

78. The renewed violence in Ein el Helweh is one illustration of the persistent risks to Lebanon that result from a combination of political fragility, dire socioeconomic conditions, radical ideologies and the presence of weapons outside the State's authority. I call upon all Palestinian factions to unite against extremist group violence, especially since militant elements that are still hiding in camps expose the entire community to the risk of a resumption of violence. I welcome the efforts to preserve stability in Ein El Helweh by the joint Palestinian security forces, which must remain able to perform their duties in order to shield the camp's residents. It is important that cooperation continue between the Lebanese authorities and Palestinian factions in that regard. Security measures should at all times be compatible with humanitarian principles and human rights standards.

79. The lack of funding for UNRWA remains of serious concern. Greater donor support, including for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared, remains key to maintaining stability in the camps and surrounding areas and as a matter of ensuring dignified conditions for Palestine refugees in Lebanon.

80. I welcome the steps taken by the Government towards the development of a national strategy for counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism in Lebanon and encourage the Government to avail itself of the full support of the United Nations and other stakeholders to that end. I encourage national and international partners to engage in that effort in close coordination with the United Nations and international partners.

81. The message of tolerance and coexistence of Lebanon remains a rare commodity in a region in turmoil. I urge efforts by the parties to the conflict and all stakeholders concerned, including all communities in the country, to prevent any resurgence of conflict, negative impact of regional tensions or relapse into political paralysis. The United Nations will continue to work as one in support of Lebanon, in close partnership with the Government, civil society and its international partners.

82. I wish to extend my appreciation to all countries contributing troops and equipment to UNIFIL and Observer Group Lebanon. I thank my Special Coordinator, Sigrid Kaag, the staff of her office, the UNIFIL Head of Mission and Force Commander, Major General Michael Beary, and the civilian and military personnel of UNIFIL for their continued efforts.